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[This is the web site of the reconstituted Socialist Party of Great Britain who were expelled from the Clapham-based Socialist Party in May 1991 for using the name "The Socialist Party of Great Britain" in our propaganda as required by Clause 6 of The Object and Declaration of Principles formulated in 1904 to which we agree. We reconstituted ourselves as The Socialist Party of Great Britain in June 1991. Any money given to us for literature or support is in recognition that we are not the Clapham based Socialist Party at 52 Clapham High Street and any mistakes will be rectified.]

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The Labour Government: A Force of Conservatism

There is a fundamental difference between the Labour Party and The SPGB. The Labour Party believes that once it attains political power it can reform capitalist institutions to meet the needs of all society.

The SPGB takes an altogether different view. The Party argues that capitalism can only be run in the interest of a privileged capitalist minority and that all policies and reforms are subject to this political reality. You cannot have equal distribution resting on the private ownership of the means of production. If the working class want to live in a society that does meet social needs rather than ones dictated by the market, competition and profit, then it will have to organise consciously and politically for Socialism.

The matter resolves itself around the very important question put by Rosa Luxemburg: "*reform or revolution?*" Labour believes that capitalism can be reformed for the better. Socialists say that it cannot and must be replaced now through revolutionary action by a Socialist majority. So who is right? Can a test be set up? There can: the test of history.

The twentieth century can be seen as the '*century of reforms*'. Yet the problems facing the working class - poverty, war, unemployment, exploitation, social alienation and second-best in goods and services - continue into the 21st century. In fact, reforms are now '*negative*' inasmuch as they are enacted to drive down costs, to make workers redundant, to worsen employees' conditions of employment, to create a more compliant and flexible labour market, and to ensure that aggressive competition, performance indicators and targets are the rule.

This shift in the use of the meaning of reforms not only vindicates The SPGB criticism of the Labour Party's predictable failure to deliver a capitalism free from the effects of capitalism but it also places into context the Labour Government's '*Modernising Agenda*' for the public sector, largely taken over from the previous Tory administration.

The term *modernising* was used during the recent Firemen's strike by the Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott. He equated '*modernisation*' with 10,000 job losses through '*natural wastage*'. When in power successive Labour governments have been forced to run capitalism against the interests of the working class, despite the wailing and gnashing of teeth from their own supporters.

Modernisation policies associated with Labour Governments are not new. It was in the late 1960s that the National Coal Board, under Tony Benn, embarked on a programme of '*modernisation*' to make British pits "*more efficient and cost effective*". This meant some 200,000 redundancies. So, to equate '*modernisation*' with job losses has a lot of justification.

This was not lost on the capitalist left who flirted with the Wilson government at the time.

In an otherwise dreadful book, "TOWARDS SOCIALISM" (1965), one of the contributors, Raymond Williams, wrote:

Classically, the whole modernisation programme is the bourgeois attack on all institutions and habits of mind that limit or hinder the aggressive and expanding operations of the market, which is seen as the only important social process (p.380).

This returns us to the initial point we made about the fundamental difference between the Labour Party and The SPGB. Labour sets out with plans to reform society in the name of '*social justice*'. Labour attains power but then has to run capitalism in the interests of the capitalist class. This means making British capitalism and its institutions more efficient, i.e. more profitable, against the background of a competitive world market. And the consequence of pursuing this primary policy is a continual assault on the working class.

Modernisation, when applied to the public sector, means overcoming inefficiency within the context of criteria determined by the market. '*Market test*' a local authority: if the work can be done by a contractor using half the workers at half the cost, then redundancies will ensue. Modernisation is the theology of New Labour. It pursues change but that change is only in terms of the market, of buying and selling. Modernisation has no end because there is no development to anything beyond the market. The past belongs to the so-called forces of conservatism, and modernisation is a technical means for breaking with this past without creating a future.

Modernisation means no confrontation of the power relations within society but a celebration of the powerful. Modernisation is '*best value*' which is just another name for low cost. Modernisation says it is about choice but no choice is given to any alternative social system other than capitalism. It is a technocratic model of society, pretending to be conflict-free and politically neutral, dissolving genuine social conflicts and issues into the abstractions of '*partnership*', '*citizenship*', '*consensus*', '*stakeholder*', and of course increased productivity.

This is where we are with the Labour Party. Just another party of capitalism. No wonder its members are leaving. It can offer no choice but the profit system, no values but ones of buying and selling, and no future other than the one we currently inhabit.

Socialists advise workers to have nothing to do with the Labour Party. We ask workers to look to their own interests and future. And that future has to be common ownership and democratic control of the means of production and distribution by all of society.

The Futility of Reformism

Reforms in education, sanitation and housing are (reforms) for which Tory, Labour and Liberal politicians have vied with each other to claim credit. Yet it is clear that the schooling received by the children of most wage and salary earners merely fits them for their role as workers. Improved sanitation reduces the threat of epidemics which do not spare the wealthy, while subsidised housing is intended to lessen the pressure by workers for higher wages. These measures have the purpose of raising the standard of efficiency of the workers, thus making them more productive for their master's benefit. The more astute and far sighted members of the ruling class have long realised this.

QUESTIONS OF THE DAY, 1978 edition, p31.

The Limit Of Trade Unionism

The SPGB has a distinctive view of the problems facing the Trade Unions. It is that - necessary as unions are to prevent employers depressing wages excessively - they are strictly limited in what they can achieve for their members within the capitalist system of society out of which unions arise and within which they operate.

However the class struggle is in effect a political struggle. Capitalists own and control the means of production with the view to making a profit. Profit is unearned income and comes from the class exploitation of the working class. Workers produce more social wealth than they receive in wages and salaries. Workers are forced onto the labour market to sell their ability to work as a commodity because they are a propertyless class of wage slaves. Workers cannot just produce and take what they want to live on. The class power and privilege of the capitalist class is protected by the machinery of government through their political agents - Labour, Tory, Social Democrats and Greens - in Parliament.

The reality is that a world capitalist class faces a world working class over the ownership and control of the means of production. Socialism begins from this global perspective. The Socialist case is addressed to the working class of the world no matter where they live. Workers have an identical class interest to organise consciously and politically to replace capitalism with socialism. Workers have no country and they have no national interest to pursue. And the socialist case is that capitalism can never be made to work in the workers' interests and should be abolished as swiftly and quickly as possible.

Capitalism, though, is divided into competing nation states. Trade unions have adapted within these political contours to fight for their members pay and working conditions. However this has sometimes meant disputes between unions either within a country over job cuts affecting one industry as opposed to another or jobs being secured in one country at the expense of another.

The trade unions' response has often been either a divisive sectarianism or narrow nationalism. Threatened internally unions have sided with sections of the capitalist class to protect the particular industry they find themselves in - mining unions supporting the mining industry and opposing the nuclear industry, for example. Threatened externally, unions call upon the government to protect the jobs of their members from being lost to foreign competitors. Class solidarity is ignored. The competition between jobs on the world labour market creates divisions, conflict and petty nationalism.

Such divisions can be seen in the recent move abroad by some companies to tap into cheaper labour markets. In December 2003, Norwich Union became the latest company to cut thousands of jobs in Britain and export work to India. Parent firm Aviva said that operating costs in India were typically 30-40% lower than in Britain and it would allow the company to provide a 24-hour service and increase profits.

Other recent announcements included proposals by the national rail enquiry service to move 600 jobs to India. And the HSBC bank said that it intended to outsource 4,000 jobs over two years.

According to the BBC (5 December 2003), unions have welcomed the Department of Trade and Industry's announcement of a study into the call centre industry. Unions are warning that the trend to shift British call centre jobs abroad will continue. To question the need for workers to have to work in these modern day sweatshops is not considered by trade unions or their members Employment and the dictates of capital to shape the way the working class have to work is also not questioned.

Instead we get petty nationalism. Kevin Curran, the general secretary of the GMB union, said: "*The impact of off shoring is not a myth - just ask the thousands who have already lost their jobs. There are actions we can take so that call centres and manufacturing don't go the way of clothing and textile industry. It's not about protectionism. It's about promoting British jobs and workers here at home*" (INDEPENDENT, 6 December 2003).

This exposes the limits of trade unionism. What unions will not criticise is capitalism, labour markets, the buying and selling of labour power, class exploitation and the wages system. "*Promoting British jobs*" is promoting the

exploitation of workers in Britain and it is saying that workers in India and Britain do not have the same class interests.

It is not in the interest of the working class for different unions to compete to recruit the same workers or ask the capitalist state to protect their members' jobs at the expense of workers elsewhere in the world. Nor is it in the interest of the working class for unions to use strikes to settle demarcation disputes. Nor is it in the interest of the working class for unions to say that one section of the working class in the world is more important than another section of the working class. More to the point is that trade unions should be criticising capitalism and not engaging in a petty nationalism which states that jobs are more important in Britain than in India.

Companies are forced under pain of competition to reduce costs, find cheaper ways to produce, and increase or extend the rate of exploitation of the employees. Unemployment is a fact of life under capitalism. You cannot have capitalism without the effects of capitalism. Class solidarity is more important than class division.

The position of The SPGB is that the action of trade unions should be supported only if it is in the interest of the working class as a whole. The unions are organised to promote the interests of their own members only, and it is on rare occasions that union action gives regard to the common interest of the working class against the employers. Socialists cannot support trade unions who believe that the protection of jobs is a nationalist issue and appeal to the capitalist state for help. And this equally applies to attacks on so-called economic migrants who it is erroneously claimed take away British jobs and housing. This leads to the poisoned politics of fascism.

What, then, can be said about the potentialities and limitations of trade union action? Something Marx wrote about it is as true now as it was over a hundred years ago: *"The working class ought not to exaggerate to themselves the ultimate working of these everyday struggles. They ought not to forget that they are fighting with effects...that they are applying palliatives, not curing the malady"* (WAGES, PRICE AND PROFIT).

Trade unions, fighting the same old battles over and over again, offer no way out of the dead-end of capitalism. There is nothing the unions can do which will substantially alter the way capitalism works.

However, there is a solution, the one for which The SPGB is organised. It is the replacement of capitalism by Socialism - which, it must be emphasised, has nothing to do with nationalisation or with having capitalism run by a Labour government.

Only Socialism will free the working class from the problems which flow from capitalism - including war, exploitation, poverty, unemployment and bad housing. As Marx urged the workers of his own day: *"Instead of the conservative motto 'A fair day's wage for a fair day's work' they ought to inscribe on their banner the revolutionary watchword: 'Abolition of the wages system' .*

Trade Unionism

The Socialist Party and the trade unions have a common origin in the class struggle. The former is the organised expression on the political field of the conscious recognition of the class struggle by the workers. Its growth is the measure of their determination to end the struggle by converting the means of living into common property, thus establishing a harmony of interests within society.

The SPGB, while recommending trade unionists to offer their utmost resistance to the worsening of conditions, never fails to point out that under capitalism the pressure on the workers is inevitable. It is not enough, therefore, merely to apply the brake to these worsening conditions. The system that gives rise to them must be abolished.

QUESTIONS OF THE DAY, 1978 edition, p45.

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A Question Of Taxation

The first thing to understand about capitalism is that there are two contending classes - a capitalist class who own

and control the means of production and a working class who do not. Of the working class, Marx said that they were:

Free labourers, in the double sense that neither they themselves form part and parcel of the means of production, as in the case of slaves, bondsmen, &c., nor do the means of production belong to them, as in the case of peasant-proprietors; they are, therefore, free from, unencumbered by, any means of production of their own (CAPITAL VOL. 1 Ch. XXVI).

Each class has its own respective income. The capitalist class receive unearned income in the form of rent, interest and profit. The working class receive an earned income in the form of wages and salaries.

Let us leave the question of the unearned income flowing to the capitalist class to one side for a moment. What needs to be asked first is what constitutes a wage or a salary.

To help answer this question we have the valuable contribution provided by Marx. He showed that the working class sell a commodity to the capitalist class. He called this commodity "*labour-power*" or someone's mental and physical ability to work. Labour power has a use value to the employer when put to work, and an exchange value as a wage or salary. The historical basis of labour power as a commodity was commented upon by Marx:

Nature does not produce on the one side owners of money or commodities, and on the other men possessing nothing but their own labour power. This relation has no natural basis, neither is its social basis one that is common to all historical periods (CAPITAL VOL. 1. Ch. VI).

A wage for Marx has a value which determines its price. But how is the wage arrived at?

Marx said that the wage is calculated by the socially necessary amount of labour that goes into its production. In a given country, at a given period, "*the average quantity of the means of subsistence necessary for the labourer is practically known*" (Marx, CAPITAL VOL. 1 Ch. VI).

In a simpler way we can say that the wage is equivalent to the bundle of commodities or subsistence basket that workers and their families need to produce and reproduce themselves as members of the working class.

The value of labour-power resolves itself into the value of a definite quantity of the means of subsistence. It therefore varies with the value of these means or with the quantity of labour requisite for their production (Marx, CAPITAL VOL. 1 Ch. VI).

If the working class did not get the wage or salary to buy these commodities then they would exist in a "*crippled state*" and would be of no use to the capitalist class.

The minimum limit of the value of labour-power is determined by the value of the commodities, without the daily supply of which the labourer cannot renew his vital energy, consequently by the value of those means of subsistence that are physically indispensable. If the price of labour power falls to this minimum, it falls below its value, since under such circumstances it can only be maintained and developed only in a crippled state. But the value of every commodity is determined by the labour-time requisite to turn it out so as to be of normal quality (ibid., p.172).

This brings us to the question of taxation. If workers needed £300 per week in order to live and a tax of twenty pounds was levied on this figure, all that happens is that the employer could only buy the labour power for £320 per week. What has happened is that the burden of the taxation has been passed from the worker to the capitalist.

If a tax was levied on the wage - the wage that buys the commodities to keep the worker alive - the employer would be faced with a struggle by the employee for higher wages. And this is precisely what happens. To increase the level or rate of taxation results in workers demanding higher rates of pay, just as happens when prices rise.

Ultimately this process works its way through to the employers and shows up, on the accountant's balance-sheet, as higher labour costs. This is why The SPGBargues that in reality taxation is not a working class issue.

However, it is a problem for the employing class, especially when they have businesses which must compete with

those of capitalists in other countries. That is why the CBI and the Institute of Directors and all those politicians - Tory or Labour - who represent the interests of the capitalist class, who see their party as the "*party of business*", make such a big play to keep taxes and public (state) spending low.

That is why these politicians are applauded by the capitalists and their organisations when they insist on cuts in government spending. From their point of view, anything which raises their costs - especially their labour costs - is seen as damaging to their business interests. From the workers' point of view, however, the income tax paid via the PAYE system has never been money in their pockets: it is simply a notional figure on the payslip.

That this is the case was shown by Adam Smith in his WEALTH OF NATIONS and by David Ricardo in his PRINCIPLES OF POLITICAL ECONOMY. Edwin Cannan, who taught economics at the LSE., also held the view that taxation was a burden that ultimately fell on the propertied class. You could hardly call these three writers Marxists.

But Marx held a labour theory of value by which to analyse the way capitalism actually is, and not the way it superficially appears to the capitalist class and its political agents.

He showed that what the workers produce as social wealth can be expressed in terms of value and surplus value. The value of what they produce is reflected in their wage or salary.

However, workers continue to work for their employers beyond the period of time the value of their work equals the value of their wages and salaries. This additional work they work for free for the employer and it is here that exploitation takes place. The surplus value, generated by exploitation, is where the capitalist class get their unearned income from.

If the wage of the working class cannot be taxed because it reflects their ability to work, the only source of income that can be taxed falls on surplus value in the form of rent, interest and profit, that is, from those who live off surplus value, whether it is taxed as company profits, rates, income tax and so on.

Workers may feel they have been taxed when they see National Insurance contributions and income tax on their wage packets but they are confusing what they see with what is actually the case. They also feel this way too when they pay a utility bill or buy goods or services, and see that in addition to the price charged, there is a percentage added on of VAT.

It suits politicians to have an accountancy method of collecting taxation from across the economy because the capitalist class and their political agents spend a large part of their politics moving the burden of taxation from one part of the capitalist class to the other. The Labour party did this with student loans. Up until they changed the rules the burden of higher education was spread throughout the capitalist class while now it is spread largely onto capitalists employing graduates.

And Marx's Labour Theory of Value was also able to explain the difference in income within the working class. For educated skilled labour, we must add the costs of education in terms of the value of commodities. "*The expenses of education enter pro tanto into the total value spent in its production*" (CAPITAL VOL. 1, Ch. VI). Unlike other commodities, the value of labour power has a "*moral*" element in it which would vary from country to country and over time.

In contradistinction therefore to the case of other commodities, there enters into the determination of the value of labour-power a historical and moral element. Nevertheless, in a given country, at a given period, the average quantity of the means of subsistence necessary for the labour is practically known (CAPITAL VOL. 1 Ch. VI).

Marx's Labour Theory of Value, not only shows how exploitation takes place, why taxation comes from profits not wages, but also shows that demands for equal pay are an illusion:

The cry for an equality of wages rests, therefore, upon a mistake, is an insane wish never to be fulfilled... Upon the basis of the wages system the value of labouring power is settled like that of every other commodity; and as different kinds of labouring power have different values, or require different quantities of labour for their production, they

must fetch different prices in the labour market. To clamour for equal or even equitable retribution on the basis of the wages system is the same as to clamour for freedom on the basis of the slavery system (WAGES, PRICE AND PROFIT).

So, in conclusion, the working class do not pay taxation. The capitalist class do. The employers have an interest in the question of taxation while the working class do not. And here is the revolutionary point of all this analysis. The real political focus of attention by the working class should be class exploitation, the wages system and its abolition.

What is Capitalism?

The attitude of The SPGB on the need to gain control of the political machinery has been logical and consistent. We hold the same view as Marx as to the necessity of the workers gaining control of the machinery of government before they can establish Socialism. We also hold Marx's view that in the industrially advanced capitalist countries the vote will give that control. The one way to prevent the capitalists from using political power against the workers is to refrain from voting them and their agents into political power. Accordingly we have always urged the workers not to vote for any candidate who is a supporter of capitalism.

QUESTIONS OF THE DAY, 1978 edition, p 14.

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Faith Schools

Dear Sir/Madam,

As you may be aware, there is an on-going debate on the issue of faith schools in Scotland. Being a school student myself, I am keen on what your Party's stance is on this issue. I am writing to enquire about your Party's opinion on faith schools, in particular the prospect of State-funded Muslim schools in Glasgow, this being arranged by converting schools which contain a majority of Muslim pupils into Muslim schools.

Safa Yousaf

Our Reply:

Thank you for your e-mail.

The SPGB stands for the common ownership and democratic control of the means of production and distribution by all of society. Means of production include factories, transport and raw resources like oil. We stand for a world-wide social system in which the planet's resources are produced and distributed directly and solely for social use. We do not discriminate on grounds of race or gender. The Socialist case is directed at the working class as a whole, both male and female, young and old, no matter where they live. We oppose racism as being class divisive.

Unlike the Labour Party, we do not pursue reforms or involve ourselves in the day to day problems of the capitalist State. This includes schools and the problems associated with preparing children of the working class for the labour market. We have one purpose; to persuade workers to become socialists and to help build up a socialist majority in order that the working class can consciously and politically replace capitalism with Socialism.

Although The SPGB does not involve itself in running capitalism, we do comment on the way capitalism affects the working class and impinges on their lives. We criticise the institutions of capitalism for what they are - institutions of class power and coercion, protecting private property ownership. Schools are no exception, and we have written about schools and education in our journal The SPGB, a copy of which we can send to you on receipt of your address.

Before we begin to answer your question on the issue of faith schools, it is important to understand what the function of education is under capitalism.

The function of schools under capitalism is to produce future workers for the labour market as cheaply and

efficiently as possible. Employers need to exploit workers possessing the necessary mental and physical skills required for the job. Capitalists exploit workers by paying them less social wealth than they receive in wages and salaries. Furthermore, the function of schools is to produce workers who will conform, who will not question capitalism, who will obey the rule of law, and who will become model citizens.

Compare the education children of the capitalist class receive to that provided for children from working class parents. The education the children of the capitalist class receive is not only qualitatively better than the schooling the children of the working class receive but it prepares them for a life of privilege and power as adult members of the ruling class.

The ideas and beliefs which are taught at school over and above the basic knowledge suitable for employers are designed to instil conformity, discipline and obedience. Religion plays its role in teaching conformity, discipline and obedience. The present Labour government likes the idea of faith schools not only because of the better schooling they are supposed to offer but because of the type of unquestioning discipline, conformity and obedience that are taught in these schools. The Government believes, erroneously, that religion under capitalism can provide the necessary social mortar to bind the bricks of society together. However, as Socialists have shown, time and time again, you cannot have capitalism without the effects of capitalism.

The SPGB is opposed to all religion on the grounds that religion provides a mental barrier preventing workers understanding their class interests. The SPGB has no leaders and we urge workers not to follow leaders, whether they are political or religious.

Religion, as with nationalism, is a social evil which has held back the world's working class from establishing Socialism. Religion, like nationalism, is class-divisive, pitting one group of workers against another group of workers. Religion has meant death and destruction in Africa, and on the Indian sub-continent. Religion has justified slavery, racism, imperialism, class-exploitation, the wages system and war.

This does not mean that Socialists defend State education where there is no religious framework. The education in schools where religion plays no role, as in French State schools, likewise forces students to accept without question a capitalist view of the world. Non-religious schools still sow the seeds of nationalism. Consequently, we are equally critical of the schooling that takes place in both faith and non-faith schools under capitalism. A genuine education for children can only exist in socialism where education will be for the purpose of achieving the development of a child's creative potential into adulthood and the ability to play an active role in the affairs of a socialist society of equals. A Socialist education will be free from the prejudice, ignorance and bigotry of religion and nationalism.

Schools reflect the relationships of the society in which they are found and cannot be insulated from the consequences of a class-divided society. The divisiveness of setting up schools for Muslim children, Catholic children, Church of England children and so on only removes racism, violence, social strife from within the school to outside on the streets. During the 1970's, following the IRA bomb explosions in Birmingham, some children from Catholic schools were attacked by Protestant children from State schools.

Where children from different religions are sent to separate faith schools, youngsters uncritically reflect their parents' religious dogmas or those propagated by the priest or Mullah, so that neither at home nor at school would these youngsters be exposed to different ideas or see that they had the same class interest with other school children from different schools. Faith schools aggravate an already existing problem for Socialists in that they make it even more difficult for Socialists to get our message across - i.e. that the working class, whatever their cultural/ethnic background, have in common a shared interest in getting rid of the system of class exploitation.

For a good example of how to promote social divisions and hostility, just look at Northern Ireland where for generations most schools have been either Roman Catholic or Protestant, faith schools all of them. It takes a brave individual there to cross the religious divide, like a Jew in Israel being brave enough to marry an Arab, or vice versa.

Although Socialists oppose all religions without distinction we note that certain religions, like Islam, seem to encourage atrocious treatment of women. The shariya law in particular is often cruel and arbitrary, quasi-medieval in its harshness. Judaism also regards women as a second class type of being - Jewish men thank God that they were

not born a woman. In the Indian subcontinent, Hindus also have a patriarchal view of women, and a widow's fate is to be regarded, at best, as so much garbage. Religion plays its part in sustaining the callous cruelties of dowry disputes, which sometimes result in the murders of so many young wives in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, by their husbands or their in-laws.

Another count against religion in our times is the absurd belief in martyrdom as a passport to Paradise. Such religious ignorance is in part responsible for suicide bombing, whether in Israel by Palestinians, or in the air by Arab terrorists, motivated by religious zeal but politically manipulated by leaders from above. Such extreme forms of terrorism make a common dialogue increasingly difficult, and so hostilities are worsened and persist down the generations, as irrational and antisocial as the Sicilian law of the vendetta.

So, regarding your question, we would say that both types of school, those with or without a religious framework, will just provide future workers for the labour market. This destruction of children's creativity to the dictates of the labour market, class exploitation and profit-making is something Socialists oppose. Schools, whether atheist or religious, will still spread to school-children ideas and beliefs that support capitalism and that teach blind loyalty to the nation state. Schools do not question the need for leaders as they do not question the market, buying and selling, and the system of commodity production and exchange for profit. And they do not question private property ownership. Faith schools just exacerbate an already existing problem for the working class - the inability to see where their class interests lie and the belief that capitalism can be made to work in their interests. The class interest for the workers is to establish Socialism because capitalism can never work in their interest. To any proposed reform of capitalism; to any problem found in capitalism, the answer of The SPGB to the world's working class has been firm and consistent. For the working class and their children to enjoy an all-round, first-class education, free from prejudice, ignorance, hate and utilitarian meanness, requires that they first have to become Socialists and organise consciously and politically to establish Socialism.

This is cold comfort for those who do not want to question the type of society in which they live and do not want to change capitalism to one where goods and services are produced for use, not for profit. It is cold comfort for those who believe that you can have capitalism without the effects of capitalism or who want to cling to the destructive ideas and beliefs of religion or nationalism. We say to these workers: "*open your eyes and think for yourselves*".

Yet there are others who do want to change society for the better, to establish a world without the poison of religion and nationalism; a world in which the earth's resources will be commonly owned. We urge those workers to join with us. As Socialists we suggest you to read our Socialist literature which you can find on our web site, spread Socialist ideas, question what you are told, and look to joining Socialists within a principled Socialist Party.!

Telling the Truth

Jeffrey Skilling, the chief executive [of Enron], was a ruthless thug who had once been asked by a teacher at Harvard Business School what he would do if he discovered that one of his products had fatal side-effects. "*I'd keep making and selling the product,*" he replied. "*My job as a businessman is to be a profit centre and to maximise return to shareholders*".

Francis Wheen, HOW MUMBO JUMBO CONQUERED THE WORLD: A SHORT HISTORY OF MODERN DELUSIONS, p283.

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What About Works Of Art

Superficial critics of Marx often ask about the value of works of art. Marx had argued that the only measurement factor common to all commodities is that they all embody varying amounts of hours of socially necessary labour.

Economists, from the Reverend Wickstead and Jevons to the free marketers at the Adam Smith Institute, deny this and argue that what all commodities have in common, and that which determines their price, is what they call "*abstract utility*".

Wickstead, who persuaded Bernard Shaw that Marx's Labour Theory of Value, was wrong, said: "*If I am willing to give the same sum of money for a family bible as for a dozen bottles of brandy, it is because I have reduced the respective satisfaction their possession will afford me to a common measure*". And Wickstead extended his argument to include the enormous price paid for a rare painting by Raphael.

In the real world, we don't do anything of the kind or even could do it.

If we apply this reasoning to gold, bread and coal, two ounces of gold sells for an amount which would buy rather less than two tonnes of bread and rather more than two tonnes of coal.

If and when the workers of the population consider buying a gold ring, brooch or watch we don't believe that they make any such comparison.

For the workers of the population the bulk of their income is spent on basic necessities - food, clothing, shelter, transport and so on. Whatever is left, they use to pay for holidays and gardening etc, up to the limit of their income.

And if a rare painting sells for millions of pounds it is because there are multi-millionaires in the world who want the social prestige that goes with ownership. If the multi-millionaires go bankrupt or lose their nerve, the price of the paintings will drop like a stone.

All the time the "*abstract utility*" or "*satisfaction*" of art lovers remains unchanged whatever the price. Of course, among the bidders for old masters are only the wealthy, capitalist institutions like pension funds, insurance companies, and art galleries supported by the capitalist State. There will not be members of the working class bidding at these auctions.

When Damien Hirst recently exhibited his conceptual art pieces, they were sold for £11 million pounds. They were bought by wealthy collectors like Saatchi not by workers, many of whom, earned less in a year than the price of one piece of Hirst's offerings. And how many workers were able to afford the £3.9m for Henry Moore's Three Piece Reclining Figure which came onto the art market recently? For the capitalist class it is no problem to use their unearned income to buy works of art. Recently a Monet was sold to a private American buyer for £2.6m (INDEPENDENT 6 November 2003).

It is also necessary to remember that the "*old master*", with its selling price for multimillionaires, is not for Marx a commodity in the way he uses the word. An old master is not reproducible. So Wickstead's reply to the Labour Theory of Value, echoed down the years by his uncritical followers, is wrongly aimed since it misses the point Marx was making about commodity production and exchange for profit within the capitalist mode of production, announced right at the beginning of the first volume of CAPITAL.

Wickstead's use of the word "*utility*" is an abuse of ordinary language. We do not know any way of comparing the "*abstract utility*" of a loaf of bread with that of a bag of coal or a gold watch.

There was once a headmaster who used to remind his pupils that "*you can't compare a donkey's tail with a flash of lightning*". At least that had the merit of being remembered by all, except those who went on to become economists.

Economists, like Oscar Wilde's cynic, "*know the price of everything but the value of nothing*".

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De Leon And The SPGB - Fact Or Fiction?

NOTE: letter sent by a member of The SPGB to the journal DISCUSSION BULLETIN in reply to the claim that the early The SPGB was influenced by De Leon:

Adam Buick (of the Clapham-based Socialist Party) insists that De Leon influenced the founder-members of The

SPGB:

The SPGB has never accepted so-called "Socialist industrial unionism"...and was never influenced by De Leon's mistaken ideas on this and could not have been any way since when The SPGB was in the process of being founded in 1903 and 1904 De Leon himself didn't hold this view anyway (DISCUSSION BULLETIN 117).

Buick's argument is based on the assumption that De Leon did his famous U-turn after The SPGB was founded (June 1904). It fails because De Leon had already turned to industrial unionism before this. In April 1904, De Leon's talk, THE BURNING QUESTION OF TRADE UNIONISM, showed a significant switch in his thinking, as Coleman noted:

This marks a fundamental break with the social-democratic theory of socialist transformation, which places the political party, bidding to win control of the state, as the principle vehicle for changing society...To achieve this "general lock-out of the Capitalist Class", as De Leon was later to call it, required a revolutionary industrial wing to the revolutionary political party...

This amounted to far more than a shift in literary rhetoric: it was a new theory of revolution" (S. Coleman, DANIEL DE LEON, 1990, pp. 80-81).

Compare the arguments of The SPGB in the first issue of the SOCIALIST STANDARD:

The Socialist...has to show the workers that while their organisation in trades will prove an invaluable aid in the transformation of society by facilitating industrial reorganisation, yet at present they can best help to emancipate themselves from the thralldom of wage-slavery by recognising that in their class struggle with their exploiters they can be most certain of success in the political sphere of action...

The first duty of the Socialist Party is the teaching of its principles and the organisation of a political party on a socialist basis. The party becoming strong will capture parliamentary and other governmental powers. When these powers - legislative, administrative, and judicial - are wrested from their present class holders, the way is clear for the building up of the industries of the country upon the principle of collective production and collective distribution and for the establishment of the socialist republic (Sept. 1904).

Other issues where The SPGB differed from De Leon included: his tolerance of reformism and compliance with the reformist Second International; his belief that Europe was still feudal and that Socialism could be started in the USA - Socialism in one country! -; and his concept of vouchers and incomes in Socialism.

On another level, Buick's argument fails for lack of evidence:- while the early The SPGB published pamphlets by Kautsky and Morris, they published none by De Leon. In fact, actual evidence of De Leon's supposed influence on the early The SPGB is about as strong as reliable evidence of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection.

For Buick it seems that, since in our pamphlet SOCIALIST POLICIES AND PRINCIPLES -SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT, we wrote "*as people trying to make a contemporary political point*" (true!), this means we were "*not writing as historians aware of or interested in the facts*" - an oblique way of suggesting that we were cherry-picking, twisting the facts to score points, at best ignorant, at worst mendacious.

Our pamphlet was an attempt to show how very misleading and inaccurate Perrin's book was. That book was clearly written with a political axe to grind, and unfortunately Perrin is not very good on facts.

Indeed while Perrin confidently asserts that "*The views of the impossibilist American SLP undoubtedly had an influence on both The SPGB. and the British SLP*", he seems to think De Leon never held any theory of revolution other than that of industrial unionism, e.g.:

Emanating from the American SLP under Daniel De Leon, socialist industrial unionism was based on the idea that socialist economic organisations were needed alongside a revolutionary political party to rival the existing trade unions...

...The SPGB disagreements with the followers of De Leon were not so much about the necessity for an economic

organisation alongside the revolutionary socialist party - they were more about matters of tactics. (D. Perrin, The SPGB...2000, pp 31-32).

Again, we ask, where's the evidence? Perrin offers only a footnote reference to Coleman's book.

As for Coleman, the only evidence he offers is that Jackson, in his old age, put something in his memoirs about the sort of pamphlets and political literature he was encouraged to read as a young man in The SPGB. No doubt he was also urged to study the writings of Marx and Engels, but on this Coleman and Perrin were silent, likewise Buick.

Our pamphlet dealt with several important issues where Perrin's book gave a slanted and misleading account of what he claims to be The SPGB theories and policies, such as his own theory - if you can call it that - of the, possibly imminent, collapse of capitalism.

It is odd that Buick chose to dig into the dim and distant past rather than answer our charge that Perrin's book systematically misrepresents what The SPGB position has been and is, on a number of theoretical and political issues.

We are sure DISCUSSION BULLETIN's readers can draw their own conclusions. To those of you who have actually forked out £13.95 for Perrin's book, we urge you - in your own interests - to get hold of our pamphlet (£1). After all, which do you prefer -fact or fiction?

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Oxbridge, Stalin And Class

The Labour government wants more children from poorer families to be educated at Oxford and Cambridge Universities. For some reason they see this as "*social justice*".

Unlike the wealth and privilege at the disposal of the offspring of the capitalist class, the working class student at Oxford and Cambridge faces a future working life of wage slavery and class exploitation, no matter what job they do or what earned income they receive.

You cannot have social justice and equality under capitalism. You cannot have socialist distribution based upon the foundations of private property ownership and commodity production and exchange for profit. This is why Labour's policies of trying to make capitalism work in the interest of all society always fail. Capitalism cannot be made to work in the interests of all society. That is why there is a pressing need for Socialism.

However, this has not stopped a reactionary clique within the ruling class, whingeing and whining at dinner parties. They are upset at the thought of the working class actually taking away places from their own children at Oxford and Cambridge which they automatically believe to be theirs by right. After all, if you are shelling out £20,000 plus a year for your children's education at Harrow, Eton, Rugby, Cheltenham Ladies College, Roedean, Wellington or Dulwich College, as well as contributing to the schooling of the working class through taxation, then you are going to be a bit miffed if your children are not going to Daddy's college.

A defender is required to put the case for the rich and privileged. Step forward the journalist, former editor of PRIVATE EYE and High Tory, Richard Ingrams, whose own family background is one of luxury and wealth. In the 1950's when Ingrams was at Oxford University, few children of the working class were students there. Ingram's confrontation with the working class would largely have been when his Scout came in to make his bed for him or the college servant poured some vintage wine for him at evening meals in the college dining room. He thinks that Labour's attempt to get more working-class children at Oxbridge is "*a Stalinist ploy*." He believes that Labour's policy is "*old-fashioned Soviet-style notions of a class war*" (THE OBSERVER, 14 December 2003). He is a modern-day Juvenal. He hates the working class. They should know their place. He is, in fact, the very class warrior he despises.

Well, the class war predated the Soviet Union. It even predated the class struggle between the capitalist class and the

working class. Some of today's private schools for the children of the rich were once founded for the benefit of the children of the poor. But the children of the poor were evicted and these schools became, instead, bastions of class education; the rule of the rich over the rest of society, training grounds for Empire. By the nineteenth century many of the public schools had become means of upward mobility, not for the poor, but for the bourgeoisie who wished to move their children into the aristocracy.

The assimilation of the British business classes to the social pattern of the gentry and aristocracy had proceeded very rapidly from the mid nineteenth century, the period when so many of the so-called "public schools" were founded, or reformed by finally excluding the poor for whom they had been originally intended. In 1869 they were more or less free from all government control and set about elaborating that actively anti-intellectual, anti-scientific, games dominated, Tory imperialism which was to remain characteristic of them (Eric Hobsbawm, *INDUSTRY AND EMPIRE: THE BIRTH OF THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION*, rev. ed., New York:: New Press, 1999).

If the bourgeoisie had supplanted the poor in the public schools they were to do so to a different aristocratic group at Oxbridge. Oxbridge was the training place of priests for the Church of England. They preached ruling class ideas from the pulpit and wrote tracts on political economy. They also told the working class not to breed, a stricture, Marx pointed out, that they did not apply to themselves.

By the first two decades of the Twentieth Century, Oxbridge was the finishing school of the bourgeoisie, and for their children and their children's children. When children of the working class went to Cambridge or Oxford, usually on scholarships, they were described as Grammar School *oiks* and despised for aping the mannerisms of the bourgeoisie just as the working class ape the aristocracy when they get married at church in top hat and tail and flowing virginal gowns.

Professor Roger Scruton, son of a railway worker, is a classic example. He read philosophy at Peterhouse and tried to become more bourgeois than the bourgeoisie. How they laughed at him. They still do, sniggering behind his back as he joins them on the fox hunt or a wine tasting outing at some posh chateau.

And the class struggle was not invented by the Soviet Union. The class struggle did take place in Russia. But it was a class struggle over the intensity and extent of exploitation that existed anywhere else in the capitalist world. Throughout Russia and its Empire the working class were exploited with a ruthlessness found in the US or Britain..

The class struggle existed, as Marx showed, because the social forces of production, at certain points in history, come into conflict with the social relations of production.

Writers, long before Marx was on the scene, were commenting on the class struggle, first between feudalism and a rising capitalist class; and then between the capitalist class and the working class. Here is Marx in his own words:

And now as to myself, no credit is due to me for discovering either the existence of classes in modern society nor yet the struggle between them. Long before me bourgeois historians had described the historical development of this class struggle and bourgeois economists the economic anatomy of the classes.

What Marx did demonstrate was:-

(1) That the existence of classes is only bound up with particular historic phases in the development of production; (2) that the class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat, (3) that this dictatorship itself only constitutes the transition to the abolition of all classes and to a classless society (Letter: Marx to Weydemeyer, 1852, in *MARX AND ENGELS: CORRESPONDENCE*, p 64, Moscow 1955).

The real political question regarding university education is to ask what it is for and for whom. For the labour government education is utilitarian; it is about producing a workforce suitable to be exploited by employers at the cheapest cost possible. University education may be a finishing school for the rich but it is increasingly becoming a place where members of the working class go in increasing numbers before entering the labour market as wage slaves. And this applies to Oxbridge whose large funding mainly derives from the State.

What workers at any university do not get is an education that will enable them to use their talents and skills for the

benefit of all society. And this point also applies to those who teach them. A real political education only begins in a Socialist party and education which benefits all of society only begins with the establishment of common ownership and democratic control of the means of production for all society. Both the Labour Government and Mr Ingrams exist to stop this occurring. They have more in common than they believe.

The *Fowl* Truth About Capitalism

A BBC programme, PANORAMA, (22.5.03) offered a powerful argument against capitalism. The programme secretly filmed inside a chicken processing plant.

Vast troughs of treated chicken flesh shone under the neon lights, like footage from the Andy Warhol film, *Frankenstein*, in which the entire cast ended up being mangled into a bloody pulp. Elsewhere in this chicken plant, a blue-gloved hand squeezed a water-logged breast until it shot out a jet of foul liquid. The image was so repulsive that the camera repeated the image another four or five times to drive home the obscenity of what was labelled "*food fit for human consumption*".

This was production of food for the working class. Entirely legal - there is profit in factory-processing chicken. Well not all chicken, because glucose syrup, lactose and scraps from cow hides are also added to make the commodity cheaper. Cost is everything. Profit's the purpose. Yuk!

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Democracy And Principle

We have received this letter from a member of the Clapham-based Socialist Party, Colin Skelly:-

I was very interested in your pamphlets and impressed particularly with those relating to Marxist economics. I do, however, have deep reservations of your views of the Socialist party, those you refer to as the Clapham traducers of traditional The SPGB analysis. As a member of the Socialist party I feel your campaign against us to be undemocratic in that the changes implemented in the 1980's were passed by a majority of Socialists. If these minor changes in the Party's position cannot be tolerated by minorities who regard themselves as "correct Socialists", then what hope the socialist revolution? The uncompromising class analysis and socialist object of the Object and Declaration of Principles that our organisations share should be the basis on which we should propagandise. We must not be foolish enough to divide ourselves on issues of party "tradition". We do after all claim to base our case on reasoned materialism rather than followers of a doctrine. If your analyses are correct then time will prove you right but you do not have a claim to tell other Socialists (as defined by The SPGB Object and D of P) where they are going wrong - that way lies a vanguardist position. I will in the course of the coming months sit down and write a more detailed response to your pamphlet on the Clapham/Ashbourne Court split, writing I should emphasise in a personal capacity.

*Yours for the unity of all Socialists, to make Socialists, for Socialism.
Colin Skelly.*

Our reply:

The letter from Colin Skelly is typical of the insidious propaganda that seeps out from the Clapham-based Socialist Party. We could begin by asking which "*Socialist Party*" he is referring to, since there are two with this name in this country alone.

Next we will look at his pious claim that we are "*undemocratic*". At the Anarchist Bookfair in London, one of their members again took the holier-than-thou attitude, claiming that he was in a "*democratic party*" and that we had no right to the name of The SPGB. We have heard this accusation of being "*undemocratic*" before, and we have answered it before.

This charge of being "*undemocratic*" is utterly untrue. The members of Camden and North West London Branch

when they reconstituted The SPGB, like all other applicants, agreed to adhere to the Party's OBJECT and DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES.

Clause 8 of the PRINCIPLES of The SPGB states that "The SPGB ... *enters the field of political action*". Not the Socialist Party. This political action is a duty to undertake for all members and all Branches of The SPGB

And this is precisely what Camden and North West London Branches did after their contrived expulsion in 1991, and that is what we do today. We take political action in accordance with Clause 8 of the DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES. We take political action as The SPGB.

So "*undemocratic*" we are not. We are principled. It was the attack on the Principles of the Party that we defended at the time, against a faction in the Party whose leaders are mostly no longer in the Clapham Party but have drifted into anarchist groups or gone on to lucrative academic careers. We note that on the internet Mr Skelly boasts of his own academic credentials when speaking on behalf of his Party (see the entry for the so-called Socialist Historians Forum). This elitism was never part of the S.P.G.B.'s tradition. Academic elitism is quite foreign to a Party of equals. Academic elitism creates a two-tier Party, one of some members who open doors and other members who walk through them.

Then there is the question of Party procedure. Mr Stair, a member of Clapham's EC, chides us for being undemocratic for not sending copies of our Joint Branch meetings to them. They have never asked. Mr Stair can write to the Acting General Secretary of The SPGB and we will send him a copy. We have nothing to hide. Not like the Clapham Party who pretend we don't exist or play down the reasons for the split under the spurious umbrella of "*democracy*".

What of Clapham's own position? This is confused, confusing and indefensible. as set out in the Declaration of Principles. It is his Party that is being doctrinaire, unprincipled and dogmatic.

Even Mr Skelly has recourse to the abbreviated name of the Party even though his own Party bans its use. He attacks us for being "*vanguardist*" but where is his evidence? All we are doing is taking political action in the full name of the Party

Nominally they still ask their members to agree with the OBJECT and DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES, including Clause 8. This, we presume, is a political, not merely a legal, undertaking. We ask Mr Skelly whether he joined The SPGB or the Socialist Party. We would also ask him who does the Object and Declaration of Principles refer to - The SPGB or the Socialist Party. Who does Clause 8 refer to, Mr Skelly, The SPGB or to the Socialist Party?

But compliance with Clause 8 is banned by the Clapham Socialist Party's 1991 Conference resolution which requires their members only to use the name, the Socialist Party, in any political action, including election campaigns. They tell applicants they have to accept the PRINCIPLES of The SPGB but simultaneously tell them they can't use the name "*The SPGB*". The applicants are told that Clause 8 of the DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES requires The SPGB to take political action but then they simultaneously deny the applicant access to Clause 8 that requires The SPGB to take political action. New members are told they are in the Socialist Party, which they didn't join because the DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES only refers to The SPGB.

And the Clapham-based Socialist Party lecture us on logic!

Clapham have turned democracy into a fetish. It is Socialist Principle that counts. And on that score they are as unprincipled as any Left-wing capitalist organisation.

Witness the unprincipled and undemocratic way in which members of their Party organised as a faction, holding secret meetings, with the aim of "*gaining control of the direction of the Party*", and making vicious personal attacks on members of the party who refused to join in their campaign to turn The SPGB into yet another opportunistic, reformist party of the Left.

Witness too the way their Central Organiser acted in 1991 to prevent our first meeting being held. Witness too the

fact that to this day their official journal has done all in its power to suppress the facts about our expulsion and our subsequent reconstitution as The SPGB.

Witness too their refusal to even consider our offer of a debate to thrash out before their members the major issues of policy and principle which stand between our two organisations.

And these fine '*democrats*' have the nerve to allege that we are undemocratic!

More to the point: we work for Socialism and nothing but Socialism, whilst their '*Socialist*' Party is committed to support for reform movements - provided these are '*democratic*'. Just like that other '*Socialist Party*' - a party of the Left, a lot more active than the Clapham-based Socialist Party, and just as undemocratic and reformist.

And why do so many members of the Clapham-based Socialist party write to us in a "*personal capacity*"? Is their Party too politically cowardly to write to us in an official capacity? Or have they nothing to say?

We call upon any Socialists in the Clapham-based Socialist Party to leave this disreputable organisation and join with us. Their membership continues to fall, their propaganda is indistinguishable from the anarchists with whom they associate and their political activity less than ours.

We have a political future they do not.

Charlatans

Peter Drucker, one of the saner management theorists, [said] that people use the word "*guru*" only because "*charlatan*" is too long.

Francis Wheen, HOW MUMBO JUMBO CONQUERED THE WORLD, p282.

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Can A Socialist Working Class Achieve It's Object By Peaceful Means

The belief that the capitalists will resist by armed force

It has been argued in the past, and it is still argued by some people today, that the British capitalist class will oppose the establishment of socialism by armed force. The argument takes the form that, historically, the ruling class in power in every country have always acted in this way, when faced with revolution, and therefore the capitalist class are bound to act similarly, faced with the change to Socialism.

The capitalist Left point to the French Revolution and the Russian Revolution as models for any future revolution and dismiss the Socialist's argument that Parliament can be used for the revolutionary purpose of establishing Socialism.

Although the future revolution envisioned by the Left is not a socialist one, the question is still worth considering. The SPGB is not a pacifist organisation but we reject the claim that a future socialist revolution will be similar to the capitalist revolutions of the late 18th century and early 20th century.

Fallacious generalisations

The capitalist Left's argument is untenable because it mistakenly assumes that in the past the ruling classes in every country have always resorted to armed force and will do so again the future. In fact events have taken a different

course in different countries. In the establishment of capitalism in place of feudalism there were several countries, including Britain, in which there was no armed struggle comparable for example with the capitalist revolutions in France and Russia.

To get to know what is likely to happen in any country it is necessary to study the history of that country, the course taken in power struggles and its political institutions. Karl Marx had something to say about this in his condemnation of those French so-called "*Marxists*" who thought that the Materialist Conception of History established a unified pattern for all countries and therefore treated the M.C.H. "*as an excuse for not studying history*". About this, Marx said that if that was Marxism, "*All I know is that I am not a Marxist*" (see Engels' letter to Conrad Schmidt, 5 August 1890).

The relatively peaceful transfer of power from the feudal aristocracy to the capitalists in Britain

In his very informative Introduction (1892) to SOCIALISM, UTOPIAN AND SCIENTIFIC, Engels compared the very different course of the history of capitalism in England to what it was in France.

In the 19th century, the unusual situation existed in Britain that, while the economic system was capitalist, the government was in the hands of the feudal aristocracy; with the willing consent of the capitalist class. It was not until the end of the 19th century that the first capitalist entered a cabinet position. The capitalists did not take steps to end this state of affairs until 1911, when they drastically curbed the powers of the unelected House of Lords. Before then, many of the governments had their Prime Minister in the House of Lords, and the Lords could in effect nullify Bills of the elected House of Commons.

The power of the Lords extended so far that they controlled the army and navy, all the officers of which were nominees of the aristocracy. As the wits of the time remarked; a Lord had four sons; one to inherit the property, one to pray for it, one to legislate in its interests and the other to fight for it. This again was with the willing consent of the capitalist class, many of whom tried to marry their daughters into the aristocracy and, via COUNTRY LIFE, ape its mannerisms.

Since 1911 the House of Lords can only delay Bills of the House of Commons and cannot interfere at all with money bills. Recently, Tony Blair has passed legislation curtailing hereditary peers from sitting in the Lords in so great a number as they used to. The Hereditary Peers now resemble their French counterparts; titled but politically ineffective.

In short, despite the Civil War in the 1640's, the transfer of power from the aristocracy to the capitalist class was wholly peaceful; not a shot was fired, and all the "*battles*" were verbal conflicts on the floors of the House of Lords and House of Commons. Although the 17th Century Civil War caused much disruption the same could not be said of the Glorious or Bloodless Revolution of 1688, which established parliamentary sovereignty, when James II, deserted by his followers, fled to France in December 1688, and William of Orange and his wife Mary (daughter of James II) were declared joint Sovereigns.

Marx had always appreciated the supreme influence of Parliament and its relevance to the supremacy of the working class and a peaceful transition to Socialism.

In an article in the New York Tribune (25 August 1852), Marx wrote:-

The carrying of universal suffrage in England would, therefore, be a far more Socialistic measure than anything which has been honoured with that name on the continent. Its inevitable result here is political supremacy of the working class (see SOCIALIST STANDARD, March 1930).

And in a speech in Amsterdam (8 September 1872), after the Hague Conference of the International Workingman's Association had adjourned, Marx touched on the question of violence, and said:

We do not deny that there exist countries like America, England, and, if I knew your institutions better, I would add Holland, where the workers may be able to attain their ends by peaceful means (BASIC WRITINGS ON POLITICS AND PHILOSOPHY OF MARX AND ENGELS", Fontana edition, p 38).

But Engels also gave a somewhat different account of Marx's view. In his 1886 Preface to the English edition of Marx's CAPITAL VOLUME 1, Engels erroneously maintained that capitalism had entered "*a permanent and chronic depression*". As a consequence, Engels thought that the unemployed would dramatically increase in numbers to such a point that they would "*take their own fate in their own hands*".

At such a moment, Engels mused:

...the voice ought to be heard of a man whose whole theory is the result of a life-long study of the economic history and condition of England, and whom that study led to the conclusion that, at least in Europe, England is the only country where the inevitable social revolution might be effected entirely by peaceful and legal means.

However, Engels was quick to add that "*He [Marx] certainly never forgot to add that he hardly expected the English ruling classes to submit, without a 'pro-slavery rebellion', to this peaceful and legal revolution.*".

Engels on the violent and peaceful transition to Socialism

In the COMMUNIST MANIFESTO, Marx and Engels wrote that some capitalists would support the revolutionary transition from capitalism to Socialism:-

Just as...at an earlier period, a section of the nobility went over to the bourgeoisie, so now a portion of the bourgeoisie goes over to the proletariat, and in particular a portion of the bourgeois ideologists, who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole.

Two "*bourgeois ideologists*" who had "*raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole*" were in fact Marx and Engels themselves.

However, Engels, unlike Marx, held definitely that the transition to Socialism would be violent almost right up to the end of his life when he finally abandoned this view and set out a peaceful strategy in his Introduction to Marx's THE CLASS STRUGGLES IN FRANCE 1848-1850, which he wrote in March 1895, just months before he died.

In discussing this, it is necessary first to look at the conditions which Engels assumed would exist at the time of revolution and would lead to violence. He was in fact assuming a premature attempt by the German Social Democratic Party to gain power, and that this would necessitate the use of "*terror*" by the SDP against its opponents.

In a letter to Bebel (24 October 1891), Engels dealt with a report that he had prophesied "*the collapse of bourgeois society in 1898*" with the possible coming to power of the SDP. Engels commented:-

There is a slight error there somewhere. All I said was that we might come to power by 1898...If on the other hand, a war brings us to power prematurely, the technicians will be our chief enemies; they will deceive and betray us wherever they can and we shall have to use terror against them but shall be cheated all the same.

It will be seen that Engels was counting on an early conquest of power by the German SDP, yet taking it for granted that a large and important part of the German working class would still be the "*chief enemies*" of Socialism.

In his Introduction to THE CLASS STRUGGLES IN FRANCE, Engels made a serious assessment of the political reality faced by workers in the advanced capitalist countries of the world and had this to say:-

The time of surprise attacks, of revolutions, carried through by small conscious minorities at the head of

unconscious masses, is past. Where it is a question of a complete transformation of the social organisation, the masses themselves must also be in it, must themselves already have grasped what is at stake, what they are going in for with body and soul. The history of the last fifty years has taught us that. But in order that the masses may understand what is to be done, long, persistent work is required, and it is just this work that we are now pursuing, and with a success which drives the enemy to despair. Everywhere the German example of utilising the suffrage, of winning all posts accessible to us, has been imitated; everywhere the unprepared launching of attack has been relegated to the background

What, of course, Engels did not grasp, was that those workers voting for the social democratic parties of Europe were not necessarily socialists, and that these parties themselves, including most of their leaders, would support their respective nations at the outbreak of war in 1914.

It was only The SPGB that was in a position to maintain a Socialist case against the war in 1914. This was because we insisted on having no leaders, we only ever let class-conscious, committed Socialists join the Party, and we only ever wanted votes from workers who rejected capitalism and wanted to establish Socialism. Indeed, several years before war broke out, The SPGB was arguing against both Bebel's jingoism and Herve's "patriotic" anti-militarism on grounds of class internationalism and the class struggle (SOCIALIST STANDARD, June 1907).

High improbability of armed resistance by capitalists in Britain

It is as certain as any forecast can be that the British capitalists will not stage armed resistance to Socialism. The same is true of some other countries. But there may be countries where armed resistance cannot be entirely ruled out - it all depends on the history, political institutions and other factors in each country. That is why socialists have always insisted that a class-conscious socialist majority must first capture the machinery of government before capitalism is transformed into socialism.

In Britain all the factors point to no armed resistance. There is no tradition in the past two centuries of armed resistance. The point has already been made that there was the transfer of power from feudal lords to the capitalists by peaceful means.

There is no record of capitalists in Parliament threatening armed resistance. While at present all MPs support capitalism, the number of MPs who are landlords or capitalists is not a very large compared to the total number of politicians there. The armed forces, the universities, the government officials and MP's themselves are largely drawn from the working class. Many MPs when they lose their seat go onto the dole.

To mount any armed resistance, those capitalists who looked to armed force would have to obtain control of modern armaments, tanks, artillery, fighter planes and bombers etc., and become trained in their use. How could they do this in view of the fact that, at that stage, the great majority of workers would be convinced of and understand the case for Socialism?

Against the armed forces of the nation in the control of the Socialist majority, an attempted armed resistance by the capitalists would be futile. There would be no question of Socialists trying to gain control where large numbers of workers were still opposed to Socialism as when assumed by Engels in his idea of the premature seizure of power.

The interesting transition to capitalism in Japan

The course of events in Japan shows the decisive part played by public opinion, and the clever strategy of the Japanese capitalists in allying themselves with the movement to restore the Emperor to the pre-eminent position he had occupied before the feudal lords had brought him down.

Instead of struggling for power only in the name of capitalism against feudalism, the capitalists ran a parallel campaign to restore the Emperor to his former position and thus get the backing of the worshippers of the Emperor.

The two armies, feudal on the one side and capitalist and Emperor on the other, were massed for a decisive struggle

but in 1868, after only a half-hearted conflict (described in the *ENCYCLOPAEDIA AMERICA*, page 829 as "*desultory fighting*"), the hereditary commander of the army in feudal Japan surrendered outright to the opposing forces (much like Churchill did with switching sides from James II to the Duke of Orange) and opened the way for the unhindered development of Japanese capitalism.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Marx and Engels took it for granted that those capitalists "*who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending the historical movement as a whole*" would support the transition to Socialism. It can be expected that these will be more numerous than was assumed in 1848 by Marx and Engels. With rising Socialist consciousness, many more capitalists would become fully aware of the inherent failure of capitalism to meet the needs of the population. British capitalists and their agents have also had long experience of contact with members of the working class and of conflicting ideas, in the continuous relations with trade unions, and in Parliament; unlike the pre-capitalist situation when the feudal landowners were isolated from the as yet underdeveloped wage and salary earning class.

A strong case can be made that faced with a socialist majority the British capitalist class would have neither the will nor the means to put up armed resistance to a socialist majority wanting to establish Socialism after first capturing political power. Nevertheless The SPGB has always recognised the necessity for the socialist majority to capture the machinery of government, including the armed forces.

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Does Casual Labour = Exploitation?

Throughout the country, there's an army of children at work. According to a survey by Workers for Connexions, 75% of them work illegally - "*in hotels, cafes and bars. They work in family businesses, on farms and for scrap metal firms*", and in all types of shop work, from street markets to supermarkets. Delivery rounds and doughnut stalls have caused horrendous accidents, some fatal, to youngsters, often working extremely long hours. Such accidents are "*under-reported, especially those to children employed in illegal industries*"(NEW STATESMAN, 12 Jan. 2004).

For decades construction and civil engineering firms have used subcontracted 'lump' labour - casuals, often with little or no training or experience. The result is an appalling accident rate - remember the cost in lives of the Channel Tunnel? As civil engineering firms took on railtrack maintenance contracts, there have been a number of accidents where railtrack workers have been killed or injured.

The salmon fisheries of Scotland rely on gangmasters supplying them with illegal migrants to work in processing plants, some working 7 days a week, 12-hour shifts, for less than £1 per day (PRIVATE EYE, 20 Feb. 2004). From Cornwall to the Fens come reports of migrant labour working in sweatshop conditions, picking flowers or processing vegetables for the supermarkets'suppliers.

The Spanish restaurant trade relies on such semi-slave labour to collect cockles for the tables of tourists. When some of these were drowned in Morecambe Bay, not far from the beach resort of Blackpool, the cry went up - they were clearly being '*exploited*'. They lived in cramped and squalid conditions, they were working long hours for precious little pay, and, like those working on farms, they had no trade union organisation.

But to claim that low pay alone means '*exploitation*' is a mistake. It is not only in such sweatshop conditions that workers are '*exploited*'. It is not only the low-paid that are '*exploited*'. In fact, all members of the working class are exploited by the capitalist class. We are all "*made use of*" by the employing class to produce surplus value and profits. That, after all, is how the system operates - fact. Without exploitation, where would profits come from? Not from Mother Nature.

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Obituary - The Late Comrade Freddie Webb

Our Comrade F. D. Webb died last year. He was one of that not inconsiderable number that first encountered The SPGB at Hyde Park meetings during the latter part of the 1939-45 war and he joined the Party in 1946.

Freddie may have not been a prominent member as such but he was certainly one that took seriously the Object and Declaration of Principles of the Party he joined. He was in touch with the then mid-Herts Group and attended meetings from time to time but ill-health was afflicting his family and limited his activity.

However, at the time of the expulsion of the two London Branches, Camden and North West London, and their re-constitution of The SPGB, Freddie was in Hyde Park when the late Comrade Harry Young and others were there to hold one of our usual propaganda meetings. Freddie was assisting the erection of the platform when a Clapham member, Edmund Grant, came up to ask Comrade Webb, "*What are you doing?*" "*Helping put up the platform*", was Freddie's reply. To which Grant's response was: "*I'll report you. I'll see you are expelled!*". -meaning expelled from the Socialist Party of Clapham. "*Your father would have been disgusted with you!*" was the retort from Freddie as Grant went off in high dudgeon.

In the event, Comrade Webb resigned from the Clapham party on the basis of disagreement on Principle. He promptly applied to join us and continue his advocacy for socialism, and from time to time attended our Marchmont Street meetings and Summer Schools. We shall miss his support and we send our sympathy to his family.

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Object and Declaration of Principles

Object

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

Declaration of Principles

THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN HOLDS:

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (ie land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.
2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle, between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.
3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.
4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind without distinction of race or sex.
5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.

6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organise consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.

7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.

8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.

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